

SECRETARIAT

ROUTING SLIP

TO:

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| 1 | DCI | | X | | |
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| 4 | D/ICS | | | | |
| 5 | DDI | | | | |
| 6 | DDA | | X | | |
| 7 | DDO | | X | | |
| 8 | DDS&T | | | | |
| 9 | Chm/NIC | | | | |
| 10 | GC | | | | |
| 11 | IG | | | | |
| 12 | Compt | | | | |
| 13 | D/OCA | X | | | |
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SUSPENSE

ASAP

Date

Remarks D/OCA to have response prepared for
DCI signature.

DCI
EX-100
7/8

STAT

ER 88-4680 X

Executive Secretary

15 Dec 88

Date

3637 (10-81)

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ROUTING SLIP

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SUSPENSE

Date

Remarks

STAT

ER 88-3983

Executive Secretary

20 Oct 88

Date

3637 (10-81)

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CIA seen blocking daring offensives against Sandinistas

THE WASHINGTON TIMES

Early last year, Nicaraguan Resistance military chief Enrique Bermudez devised a plan: Several thousands of his troops would quietly encircle, then attack, the central Nicaraguan city of Matagalpa. With the element of surprise, Mr. Bermudez believed, the guerrillas would overwhelm the Sandinista garrison and their Redeye missiles would knock down any government helicopters trying to reinforce the city.

The plan called for the fighters to hold Matagalpa until the Sandinistas launched a frontal assault, then melt away back into the surrounding mountains.

"I wanted to do it for the propaganda value," says Mr. Bermudez. "Every reporter in Nicaragua would have had to acknowledge our strength."

But the attack never took place. Asked why, Mr. Bermudez was a little vague: "Not all of our troops were available."

A State Department official, however, provides a more explicit explanation: The plan "just scared the [expletive] out of everybody in Washington. ... The Americans never wanted to risk the Contra force. They always wanted small-unit actions."

"I don't know if it would have worked or not. I can understand the CIA small-unit arguments. They make a certain amount of sense. But it just seems to me that we never wanted to do what the Nicaraguans wanted to do, what the Contras wanted to do."

The relationship between U.S. officials and the resistance has been tense since CIA agents first began

streaming into resistance camps in Honduras in mid-1982. Frequent political disputes between the guerrillas and their gringo patrons have become public and well-documented.

But there have been almost as many disagreements over military strategy and tactics. Sometimes the CIA has undertaken operations and then ordered the fighters to take credit for them, even if they turned out to be disasters. (The mining of Nicaraguan ports was one such operation.) Sometimes the agency has consulted the resistance fighters, but refused to let them participate.

In 1984, for instance, the CIA sent out frogmen to blow up a bridge and an oil pipeline on Nicaragua's Pacific coast. Instead of using Nicaraguan divers who knew the area, however, the CIA hired Ecuadoreans, Costa Ricans and Salvadoreans. The saboteurs got lost, dropped one load of explosives, botched the placement of another and missed the bridge altogether.

On other occasions, U.S. officials have blocked operations proposed by the guerrillas.

- The guerrillas wanted small,

The Washington Post _____
The New York Times _____
The Washington Times A-10
The Wall Street Journal _____
The Christian Science Monitor _____
New York Daily News _____
USA Today _____
The Chicago Tribune _____

Date 19 Oct 88

speedy patrol boats they could use to attack Soviet ships unloading arms in Nicaragua's Atlantic ports. The fighters reasoned they would benefit militarily by depriving the Sandinistas of arms and politically by calling the world's attention to the vast quantities of Eastern bloc arms flowing into Nicaragua. U.S. officials, wary of involving the Soviets more directly in the war, said no.

- The guerrillas planned a combined air raid/commando attack on the military airstrip at Managua airport, where large numbers of Soviet-made helicopters are parked. The air raid would have been carried out with a jet fighter "borrowed from friends," according to one American familiar with the proposal. (The "friends" probably were the Honduran air force.) U.S. officials vetoed that one for fear civilians might be killed or wounded.

- In a dispute that the fighters finally won, the CIA resisted providing supply aircraft to the guerrillas and urged them instead to haul ammunition and weapons in by foot. The argument — known as "the Ho Chi Minh trail question," after the supply line used by the communist forces during the Vietnam War — went on for years.

For the first year and a half of the war, the CIA adamantly refused airplanes, and guerrillas had to hike back and forth to the Honduran border for supplies, a march that could take weeks. Finally, in 1983 the fighters got two ancient C-47s for airdrops, but it was 1987 before the United States set up a comprehensive aerial supply system.

Some U.S. officials still doubt the wisdom of giving in to the resistance on that point. "It left them totally dependent on the United States," says one American official. "When we turned off the spigot [earlier this year], that was that."

Resistance officials still think they made the right choice, although their troops often found themselves shaking their heads over the supply operation.

— Glenn Garvin

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